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ABSTRACT

Factors and perceptions of stress in educational administration are examined in this report. A survey of 86 administrators in Richland County, Ohio, in which the Administrative Stress Index was used to explore causes of stress and to rate the severity of each stressor, yielded a 97 percent response rate. Results were statistically analyzed for aggregate and disaggregate data by administrative level and by four demographic variables. Five categories of stress factors were developed: administrative constraints; administrative responsibilities; interpersonal relations; intrapersonal conflicts; and role expectations. Findings indicate stressors common to all administrative levels as well as factors unique to specific positions; however, time and administrative constraints were most frequently perceived as sources of stress for site-based administrators. Recommendations are made for the inclusion of stress management in professional development programs tailored to individuals and administrative levels, for mentoring programs, and for further research on gender-specific issues. Five tables are included. (15 references) (LMI)

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STRESS AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: VARIATIONS IN STRESS FACTORS ACROSS ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS

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Stress and Educational Administration: Variation in Stress Factors Across Administrative Levels and Implications for Administrative Practices

Abstract

This study reports the results of a survey of 86 Richland County, Ohio, school administrators. *The Administrative Stress Index*, was employed to explore the etiology of stress in educational administration and to rate the severity of each of the identified stressors. The results were statistically analyzed and interpreted for aggregate data as well as disaggregate data by specific administrative levels (superintendent, assistant superintendent, central office personnel, high school principal and assistant principal, junior high school principal and assistant principal, and elementary school principal). Testing for significant correlations among the 35 survey items as factored into five major stress categories and the demographic data was conducted for each administrative subgroup. The five stress factors - (1) administrative constraints, (2) administrative responsibilities, (3) interpersonal relations, (4) intrapersonal conflicts, and (5) role expectations - were analyzed by four demographic variables - (1) administrative experience, (2) chronological age, (3) percent of total life stress which is job related, and (4) total number of hours worked per week. Results indicate stressors common to all levels of the administrative team as well as items which were more stress inducing for specific administrative positions. The researchers found that demands on time and administrative constraints were the most frequent source of stress for site-based school administrators in Richland County. Implications for administrative practices and recommendations for professional development are discussed.

Introduction

One factor that appears to affect the job performance of school administrators is stress. Stress has been defined as "any characteristic of the job environment which poses a threat to the individual - either excessive demands or insufficient supplies to meet his or her needs" (French, 1976, cited in Cedoline, 1982). French indicates that stress is highly dependent on the *individual's perception of his or her environmental demands*. Hans Selye

(1977), pioneer in the field of stress research, has commented that: "We can no longer count on having finished our training for our work or on having arrived at our goal in society; nowadays the skills and knowledge demanded by any job, as indeed the goals of society itself, are developing (or at least changing) at such an unprecedented rate that *our first objective must be to learn how to cope with the stress of adaptation to change both in our work and in our social goals*".

Although medical literature forewarned organizational psychologists and social science researchers of the deleterious effects of stress on the human physiology, the causes of stress within organizations were not addressed until the recent past (Saffer, 1984). A review of the literature indicates that occupational stress research has been broad based and generic in nature with recommendations generalized across a continuum of occupational contexts and therapeutic milieus.

Dr. Walter Gmelch, Washington State University, was one of the first researchers to investigate stressors that specifically relate to the field of educational administration. Dr. Gmelch's theory and research methodology were employed in part in this study.

The efficacy of stress reduction and management has been established in the literature (Friedman and Rosenman, 1974, Giammateo and Giammateo,

1980, Gmelch and Swent, 1982, Holmes and Rahe, 1967); however, assessment procedures and intervention strategies within the context of the organizational framework are nebulous (Murphy and Hurrell, 1987). Educational administrators have recognized the importance of implementing professional development programs for their administrative staff which are designed to minimize the negative effects of stress on administrator job performance and ultimately teacher/student accomplishment.

Efficacy aside, the declining economic status of the majority of American schools mandates school administrators maximize the benefit received from each dollar allocated for professional development. If a school administrator is to receive the greatest benefit from such training programs, it is crucial that the most pressing issues related to stress *as perceived by the participating administrators*, be identified.

Statement of the Problem

Unfortunately, all too often, stress issues identified by professional organizations or researchers are projected upon a local school district with the hypothesis that the local development programs that address those issues will provide the desired results. The etiology of stress perceived by local educational administrators may vary significantly among school districts, and interestingly, among the various levels of administration. Consequently,

inservice programs that are not designed around the crucial stress issues as perceived by the local administrative staff risk addressing topics that are of little importance to the inservice participants. If educational administrators are to maximize the benefits received from the expenditure of local financial resources, then professional development must be tailored to meet the specific needs of the individual school administrator within the context of the local school setting. To these ends, this paper presents a method used to identify the stress factors most important to the educational executive within various levels of administration among nine Ohio school systems. The similarities and dissimilarities among the major causes of stress identified by the various administrative groups provided the basis for the development of inservice programs.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to establish a process to measure local factors as perceived by school administrators as stress-inducing or stress related and from these data, gain insights with which to develop professional inservice programs that more specifically address local administrator needs. To fulfill this major purpose, three questions were examined:

1. What is the local school administrator's perception of the major sources of stress in his or her job?

2. Do the sources and severity of stress, as perceived by school administrators from contiguous local districts, vary among the different levels of educational administration?
3. Based on the findings, what are the implications for administrative practices and recommendations for professional development?

Methodology

Sample

The participants in this study included all school administrators from nine contiguous public schools in Richland County, Ohio. The term administrator, for the purpose of this research sample, was defined as: Elementary, Junior High, and Secondary Assistant Principal; Elementary, Junior High, and Secondary Principal; Central Office Personnel, Assistant Superintendent, and Superintendent. A total of 86 surveys (N=86) were mailed with a return rate of 97% Of those surveys returned, 93% (N=80) of the total were usable and data were subsequently loaded and analyzed. The mean age of the respondents was 43.8 and the mean years of administrative experience completed was 11.74. Of the total respondents, 85% were male and 15% were female. Ph.D. degrees were earned by 6.3% of the total respondents while 93.8% attained M.Ed. degrees. The mean hours worked per

week, including evenings, was 57 hours with a range of 45 - 80 hours. The mean percent of total life stress attributed to work was 61% with a range of 5% to 97% of the total life stress being job related.

Instrument

The subjects in the sample population were surveyed with the *Administrative Stress Index* (ASI) to identify factors causing stress. Analyses of the data presented in this study were derived from respondent stress values rated on a Likert-type scale of: 1 = rarely or never bothers me, 2 or 3 = occasionally bothers me, and 4 or 5 = frequently bothers me. As a component of the research procedure, the subjects were guaranteed anonymity when responding to the ASI with the anonymity maintained throughout the data collection process.

The ASI, a 35-item questionnaire, was developed through a "series of iterations to insure that all relevant facets of job-related stress were explored" (Gmelch, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1984). The questionnaire's initial core was derived from the more generic 15-item *Job Related Strain* (JRS) index by Indik, Seashore, and Slesinger (1964). The JRS was supplemented with items identified from current educational administration research and from stress logs forty school administrators kept for a period of one week. The administrators were to log the following: (1) the most stressful single incident occurring each

day and (2) the most stressful set or series of related incidents occurring each day (e.g., recurring telephone interruptions, pending grievances, parent-teacher conflicts, etc.). Also at the end of the week, administrators were requested to report stress which might not have occurred during the week the stress logs were maintained. The data yielded the item-pool of stressors from which the ASI was derived.

Reliability figures for the ASI were not available at the time of this writing; however, projections of moderate to high reliability figures could be justified by the fact that school administrators participated in the development process of the ASI which included the maintenance of daily stress logs. Gmelch maintains that the Journal of Applied Psychology accepts the instrument because of the integral subject participation throughout its development. Similarly, ten of the fifteen items from the JRS (Indik, et.al., 1964), which reports high reliability, were incorporated into the ASI.

Analyses of Data

In order to form groups of meaningful size, respondent data were grouped into four major administrative subgroups: (1) Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and Central Office Personnel, (2) Junior and Senior High School Principals, (3) Elementary School Principals, and (4) all Assistant Principals.

Gmelch's factor analysis of the individual survey items was accepted by the authors because the purpose of this study was not to determine whether the factor analysis of items or the multidimensionality of the construct of stress presented by Gmelch could be replicated, but rather, to develop the most germane inservice programs for school administrators. Thus, the ASI was used as a diagnostic tool to measure the needs of school administrators at the local level.

Gmelch's factor analysis of the 35 stress items identified five major stress factors or clusters with seven individual stress items within each cluster. These stress factors are described as follows: (1) **Administrative Constraints** - (relating to time, meetings, workload, and compliance with federal, state, and organizational rules and regulations); (2) **Administrative Responsibilities** - (relating to tasks characteristic of nearly all management positions, including supervision, evaluation, negotiations, budget and finance, and gaining support for programs); (3) **Interpersonal Relations** - (relating to resolving differences between parents and the school, between subordinates, superiors, or staff members, and the handling of student discipline problems); (4) **Intrapersonal Conflicts** - (relating to conflicts between performance and one's internal beliefs and expectations; and (5) **Role Expectations** - (relating to stress caused by a difference in expectations of self and the various people serviced).

Results

Comparison of Stress Factor Means

Table 1 presents the stress factor means and standard deviations for the aggregate data as well as that for individual administrative subgroups. The column for "All Administrators" represents aggregate data for all subgroups and serves as a reference point for subgroup comparisons.

All Administrators. When analyzing the aggregate data, the stress factor category of Administrative Constraints was perceived to be most stressful ($\bar{x}=2.72$) for school administrators in this study.

The Role Expectation category was ranked the least stress-inducing of the five stress factors with a mean of 2.17. Interpersonal Relations ($\bar{x}=2.49$), Administrative Responsibilities ($\bar{x}=2.36$), and Intrapersonal Conflict ($\bar{x}=2.33$) were ranked two through four, respectively.

In comparing stress factors among the various administrative subgroups, no single factor was ranked consistently across all subgroups; however, similarities and dissimilarities among several groups were identified when comparing subgroup means.

Variations in Stress Factor Means among Administrative Subgroups

Assistant Principals. The Assistant Principals differed the most from the other administrative subgroups in the study. While the other administrative

Table 1

Comparison of Stress Cluster Means by Individual Administrative Subgroup

Stress Factor	All Admin.	RO	Ass't. Princ.	RO	Ele. Princ.	RO	Jr./Sr. Princ.	RO	Supt./Ass't. Central O.	Supt. RO
Administra. Constraints	**2.72** (.75)	1	2.37 (.63)	3	2.92 (.83)	1	2.63 (.71)	1	2.75 (.71)	1
Interperson. Relations	**2.49** (.61)	2	2.61 (.52)	1	2.69 (.59)	2	2.29 (.54)	2	2.27 (.72)	4
Administra. Responsibil.	**2.36** (.63)	3	2.23 (.34)	5	2.20 (.68)	5	2.23 (.60)	3	2.63 (.65)	2
Intraperson. Conflicts	**2.33** (.54)	4	2.30 (.34)	4	2.51 (.53)	3	2.04 (.50)	4	2.37 (.59)	3
Role Expectation	**2.17** (.68)	5	2.40 (.79)	2	2.38 (.72)	4	1.90 (.52)	5	2.02 (.63)	5

The numbers enclosed in parenthesis are standard deviation values.

RO denotes rank order of severity for each stress factor by subgroup.

n = 80

subgroups ranked Administrative Constraints as the most stress inducing [ranked #1], Assistant Principals reported the stress perceived from the Administrative Constraints stressors such as "compliance with federal/state rules and regulations" and "completing paperwork on time" as lower [ranked #3].

Uniquely, the most stressful aspect of educational administration for Assistant Principals in this study was the Interpersonal Relations factor which consists of stress derived from resolving differences between students, parents, and staff. Assistant Principals were the only subgroup to rank Interpersonal Relations as the most stressful [ranked #1] aspect of school administration. This finding is consistent with the administrative tradition of delegating the responsibility and role of "school disciplinarian" to the Assistant Principal.

Role Expectation stressors were ranked last or next to last by the other administrative subgroups, while Assistant Principals ranked it as their second most bothersome category of stressors originating from a difference in expectations of self and the various people served. Frequently, in suburban and rural school districts, the Assistant Principal also serves as athletic director, school disciplinarian, and chief mediator among parents, students, and staff. It is quite possible that the increased levels of stress for the Assistant Principal result from the multitude of assigned roles.

Assistant Principals were more similar to Elementary Principals than their counterparts in the Superintendency when comparing stress from the Administrative Responsibilities factor. Assistant Principals and Elementary Principals reported the lowest levels of stress from the typical management functions such as managing human resources, school finance, and negotiations; whereas Superintendents and Central Office personnel ranked the Administrative Responsibilities factor higher. This finding indicates that the typical management responsibilities and the constraints intrinsic to school administration are not as stress inducing or relevant for Assistant Principals as the conflicts and mercurial relationships among students, parents, and the school.

Elementary Principals. Elementary Principals were similar to most other administrative subgroups in perceiving the Administrative Constraints factor (which contains stressors related to time, meetings, workload, and compliance with governmental mandates and reporting schedules), as most burdensome with the highest mean value (2.92) for all administrator subgroups reporting.

The Elementary Principals were similar to their administrative counterparts at the Junior/Senior High School administrative levels in rating the Interpersonal Relations factor second. These data support the finding that the

Interpersonal Relations factor is more stressful for the site-based, building level administrator compared to their counterparts in the Superintendency, who by nature of the position, are removed from the potential for conflict that is ever present at the building level.

Interestingly, the Elementary Principal subgroup was not only the largest subgroup but also contained the largest number of female administrators. Further examination of the most stressful individual item in the Intrapersonal Conflict cluster revealed that women in the elementary principalship in this study experienced more stress than men in the same administrative position due to "imposing excessively high self expectations". One explanation for such high self expectations [ranked #2 most stressful individual item, (Frick,1990)] imposed by the female administrator could be the multiplicity of roles women feel compelled by society to accomplish successfully.

Junior and Senior High School Principals. Junior/Senior High School Principals were the only subgroup to reflect the same rank order of means as the aggregate data. This subgroup reported the lowest mean value for the Role Expectation factor. Compared to Assistant Principals and Elementary Principals, it appears that in terms of Role Expectation, Junior/Senior High School Principals perceive themselves more accurately with regard to their self

expectations in relationship to what others expect of them.

Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Central Office Personnel. Consistent with the administrators in the other subgroups, Superintendents and Central Office Personnel reported the Administrative Constraints factor as most stressful.

Administrative Responsibilities was ranked second by this subgroup in contrast to lower stress levels perceived by the building level administrators for this same stress category. This seems logical because the scope of administrative responsibilities is more extensive for Superintendents. This source of stress is understandable as boards of education charge the Superintendent with the responsibility of communicating the entire school district's mission and needs to the community. As the Superintendent interfaces between the community and the board of education, critical public relations lie in delicate balance. It is this potential for crisis that can generate considerable stress for the Superintendent.

Superintendents are similar to the Secondary Principals in reporting lower levels of stress from the Role Expectation factor which indicates a realistic understanding of self and expectations of the board and other people served.

Correlation of Demographic Variables and Administrative Subgroups

A set of demographic variables, namely the total years of administrative experience, chronological age of the administrator, the percent of total life stress which is job related, and the total number of hours worked per week was correlated with the five stress factors to test for significance. These are illustrated in Tables 2 through 5. Each table will be discussed in terms of the demographic variables found to correlate significantly with the stress factors.

Superintendents/Assistant Superintendents/and Central Office Personnel. In Table 2, there were four significant correlations, three of them falling under the category of total life stress which is job related. The highest correlation was .59 between job related life stress and Administrative Constraints significant at the .005 level. The remaining correlations, Intrapersonal Conflict and job related stress (r=.47) and Role Expectation and job related stress (r=.45), were significant at the .05 level.

Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and Central Office Personnel reported that as the percent of total life stress which is job related increased, the stress from the Administrative Constraints, Intrapersonal Conflicts, and Role Expectations factors increased.

There was a positive correlation between the Administrative Constraints stress factor and the number of years of administrative experience completed.

Table 2

Correlations among Stress Factors and Demographic Variables for Superintendents / Assistant Superintendents / Central Office Personnel

Stress Factor	Administrative Experience	Chronological Age	Percent/Total Life Stress Job Related	Hours Worked Per Week
Administrative Constraints	.41*	.17	.59***	.07
Administrative Responsibilities	.29	.16	.32	.27
Interpersonal Relations	.03	-.02	.45	.15
Intrapersonal Conflict	.18	.00	.47*	.00
Role Expectation	.27	.21	.45*	.12

n = 20

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .005$

This correlation indicates that, for Superintendents, administrative experience may not aid in alleviating or reducing stress derived from the constraints of time, meetings, workload, and compliance with federal and state mandates.

High School and Junior High School Principals. Table 3 reflects four significant correlations, the first two relating to the number of years of administrative experience and the stress factor categories Interpersonal Relations and Role Expectations.

Junior/Senior High Principals with greater administrative experience reported less stress from the Interpersonal Relations factor ($r = -.46$, $p < .05$), which deals with resolving differences among students, parents, and staff. This finding indicates that experience may function to reduce stress from this factor by enabling the administrator to cultivate effective conflict resolution skills. In contrast, the number of years of administrative experience did not serve to alleviate or reduce stress caused by differences in role perception ($r = .49$, $p < .05$).

When Junior/Senior High Principals reported an increase in the percent of total life stress which is job related, the stress perceived from the Role Expectation factors such as unclear job responsibilities, insufficient evaluative feedback about job performance, and conflicting demands from those in authority also increased ($r = .43$, $p < .05$). Interestingly, there was an inverse

Table 3

Correlations among Stress Factors and Demographic Variables for High School and Junior High School Principals

Stress Factor	Administrative Experience	Chronological Age	Percent/Total Life Stress Job Related	Hours Worked Per Week
Administrative Constraints	.21	.09	.12	-.12
Administrative Responsibilities	-.37	-.17	.30	.00
Interpersonal Relations	**-.46***	-.36	.18	.11
Intrapersonal Conflicts	-.02	-.15	.01	-.03
Role Expectation	**.49***	.37	**.43***	**-.42***

n = 19

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

relationship between the Role Expectation stress factor and the total number of hours worked per week ($r = -.42$, $p < .05$). This finding indicates that increasing the hours worked per week tends to decrease the stress derived from Role Expectation; therefore, meeting the demands of others by working extra hours appears to be an attempt to compensate for and avoid stress from supervisory demands. Over the long term, this coping style could lead to occupational burnout.

Assistant Principals. Only two correlations were significant in Table 4; however, it contained the item with the highest correlation of all the tables. Hours worked per week correlated -.89 with stress related to Administrative Responsibilities. This would indicate Assistant Principals compensated for the stress from the Administrative Responsibilities factor which relates to management tasks such as evaluation/supervision, gaining public approval for school programs, and contract negotiations by increasing the number of hours worked per week.

The other significant correlation for Assistant Principals, administrative experience and the Administrative Constraints factor ($r = -.51$, $p < .05$), indicates that increasing experience in educational administration tends to reduce the perceived stress from meetings, time constraints, telephone interruptions, workload, and compliance with governmental and organizational

Table 4

Correlations among Stress Factors and Demographic Variables for Assistant Principals

Stress Factor	Administrative Experience	Chronological Age	Percent/Total Life Stress Job Related	Hours Worked Per Week
Administrative Constraints	**-.51***	-.41	-.21	.22
Administrative Responsibilities	-.23	.28	.36	**-.89***
Interpersonal Relations	.18	.20	-.12	-.47
Intrapersonal Conflicts	-.30	-.05	.27	.37
Role Expectation	.19	.07	.03	.13

n = 15

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

rules and regulations. The individual survey items (contained in the Administrative Constraints factor) "feeling that meetings take up too much time" and "being interrupted frequently by telephone calls" were ranked #1 and #3 respectively as most stress inducing by Assistant Principals (Frick, 1990). This finding may indicate that experience functions to reduce or alleviate the stress perceived from Administrative Constraints.

Elementary Principals. Lastly, Table 5, contained three correlations significant at the .05 level. Hours worked per week correlated .38 for both Intrapersonal Conflicts and Role Expectation. This would indicate that Elementary Principals reporting greater number of hours worked per week also perceived higher levels of stress from the following: (1) the Intrapersonal Conflict factor which centers around conflicts between performance and one's internal beliefs and expectations and (2) the Role Expectation factor which deals with stress caused by a difference between self expectation and the expectations of the various people served.

The remaining significant correlation ($r = -.37$, $p < .05$) for chronological age and the Administrative Constraints factor, indicates that as Elementary Principals get older the stress perceived from Administrative Constraints (time, meetings, telephone interruptions, reports, paperwork, compliance with governmental /organizational rules and regulations) is

Table 5

Correlations among Stress Factors and Demographic Variables for Elementary Principals

Stress Factor	Administrative Experience	Chronological Age	Percent/Total Life Stress Job Related	Hours Worked Per Week
Administrative Constraints	-.25	**-.37***	.30	.30
Administrative Responsibilities	-.03	-.08	.24	.19
Interpersonal Relations	-.17	-.26	.20	.19
Intrapersonal Conflicts	-.03	-.11	-.15	**.38***
Role Expectation	-.09	-.04	-.08	**.38***

n = 26

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

perceived as less stressful. This finding may be related to the number of females in this subgroup. Since, the correlation between Administrative Constraints and administrative experience was ***not*** significant, but chronological age was a significant factor, this may indicate that older females whose children may be older and more independent are better able to cope with the stresses in this factor.

Discussion and Administrative Implications

Many similarities and dissimilarities were found among the subgroups of administrators in this study in terms of their perception and ranking of stress factors. Most striking was the similarity across subgroups regarding the stress factor Administrative Constraints. Three of the four subgroups ranked this factor as most stress inducing. Research indicates that inservice programs that are not designed around the crucial stress issues identified by the local administrative staff may be centered on topics that are of little importance to the inservice participants. Such programs will not maximize the effectiveness of the school district's training dollars. If only one inservice is possible for the subjects in this study, these results indicate that the most cost effective and relevant training would focus on reducing stress in areas pertinent to the Administrative Constraints stress factor. Professional development which addresses the areas of time management, dealing with interruptions, and

effective conduct of meetings would have the greatest potential for reducing stress as perceived by the participating administrators in this study.

Variations in perception of stress among the subgroups indicate that needs and priorities are different, thus justifying individualized and tailored professional development programs for the various administrative levels. Similar findings by the Los Angeles Unified School District indicate that the value of a "needs-based, owned by participants, differentiated, cooperatively planned, individualized, and involved" approach to professional development for educators is the most effective (Joyce, 1990). Los Angeles Schools researchers revealed that "standard off-the-shelf programs that offer minimal interaction and little ownership are poorly attended and only moderately valued."

In the present study, Assistant Principals are an illustration of a subgroup requiring a unique and tailored approach to focus on the most important and relevant needs. Assistant Principals were the only subgroup to rank the Interpersonal Relations and Role Expectation factors as most stressful. In order to meet the specific needs as perceived by the Assistant Principals, professional development should center around the following: (a) conflict resolution skills, (b) student discipline procedures, (c) effective communication skills, and (d) job analysis.

The inverse relationship between the Administrative Constraints factor and the number of years administrative experience justifies consideration of a mentoring program so that more experienced administrators can impart the knowledge and skills they have acquired in an effort to aid the less experienced Assistant Principal.

Superintendents could benefit from continual updates on compliance with governmental and organizational rules and regulations as well as networking on these topics through ongoing involvement in their professional organizations.

The subgroup of Elementary Principals is unique in that it contained the greatest number of women indicating there may be some gender specific issues in areas dealing with role perception, especially for the younger female principal who may have young children. This is an area that could benefit from further investigation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The intent of assessing stress in educational administration is not to escape stress entirely but rather, it is to enable administrators to manage stress in the most effective manner while maximizing the benefits of school dollars spent for professional development programs. It is crucial that the most pressing issues, as perceived by the local administrator, be identified in order

to maximize the benefit received from inservice training. As a result of the systematic use of locally-based assessment procedures, the objectives established for the professional development of school administrators have a greater probability of alleviating administrator dysfunction due to stress, diminishing administrator complacency, and enabling the administrator to feel a sense of harmony between the school's goals and his/her individual professional growth.

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